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SUBJECT: VP ABDEL MEHDI ON LONG-TERM STRATEGIC
RELATIONSHIP, IRANIAN ANXIETY, AND SADRIST SPLITS

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Just back from an extended visit to neighboring Arab states and Iran, Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi told the Ambassador on October 6 that his soundings among Iraq's political leaders provide grounds for optimism that a bilateral long-term strategic relationship agreement can be concluded by the end of 2008. During his "private" visit to Iran, a procession of senior Iranian officials confided deepening anxiety over a perceived escalation of U.S.-Iran tension, and asked him to broker a new round of formal USG-Iranian talks. The Iranians claimed to be doing their part to reduce bilateral conflict by pressuring Moqtada al-Sadr to impose a freeze on attacks by his Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia and by stopping the flow of Iranian weapons to Iraq, and Adel stated he warned them to do more to tone down their bad acts and rhetoric. Adel opined that Moqtada's freeze order has divided JAM, and he confided that the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (ISCI) is currently dealing directly with Sadr over the text of an agreement in which each group pledges not to engage in attacks on the other and to respect government authorities and institutions. He reported that his visit to Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan and Syria was a success, and that Syrian President al-Assad appears to be moderating his stance toward the GOI and its relationship with the USG. End Summary.

Optimistic About Long-Term Strategic Agreement

¶2. (C) Noting that both President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki wish to conclude a bilateral long-term strategic agreement by the end of 2008, the Ambassador said the August 26 Declaration by Iraq's five top leaders serves as a framework for moving forward on the issue. Adel replied that the basic agreement concept is accepted by Iraq's political leaders, and he was surprised to learn during his recent trip to Damascus that even Syrian President Bashar al-Assad expressed a positive view on the matter. Adel suggested the best way to move forward would be for Iraq's top five leaders to submit a document containing the broad outline of an agreement to the Political Council of Iraq's Parliament at an early stage to obtain parliamentary support from the outset. He claimed that even the Fadhila Party and Sadrists understand the need for such an agreement and would not obstruct the process. On a somewhat related note, Adel said that while the GOI is not legally obligated to submit the matter of UNSCR 1723 renewal to the Iraqi Parliament for approval, it will probably do so this time around.

Nervous Iranians Fear War, Want More Talks

¶3. (C) Just back from a "private" visit to Iran, Adel said he met with Iranian National Security Advisor Ali Larijani, former President Rafsanjani, Qods Force leader Qassem Sulaimani, Foreign Minister Mottaki, and other Iranian officials who all expressed anxiety and fear over a perceived

escalation of tension and possible war with the U.S. The Iranians claimed to be doing their part to reduce bilateral conflict by pressuring Moqtada al-Sadr to impose a freeze on attacks, particularly shelling of the Baghdad IZ, by his JAM militia, and by stopping the flow of Iranian weapons to Iraq.

He said Rafsanjani was so concerned about the current situation that he asked Adel to stay an extra day to meet Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad, but Adel declined due to his schedule. Larijani and Rafsanjani pressed Adel to work with his "American friends" to arrange another round of bilateral talks, after which both sides could make public statements. Adel stated he warned the Iranians that they need to do more to de-escalate conflict, including a halt to rhetoric about "wiping Israel off the map," and to be aware that armed conflict could be sparked inadvertently by an "accident" on the Iraq-Iran border or in the Gulf. The Ambassador noted that we had seen a reduction of indirect fire on the IZ, but that the rest of the "freeze" picture remains unclear and it may take more time to properly assess the Iranian claim regarding a halt to weapons flows. The Ambassador noted that we have not seen positive action from Iran that would justify another round of formal talks.

Sadrist Split on Freeze Order, ISCI/Sadr Agreement In Works

¶4. (C) After the Ambassador remarked that preliminary reports link JAM to the recent IED assassination attempt against the Polish Ambassador, Adel noted the GOI had also heard reports of JAM activity in Karrada, scene of the attack. Adel opined that JAM is divided into many groups, some of which take orders from Sadr's office in Najaf and others from an office in Shola City: while "upper level" JAM members are loyal to Sadr and are obeying the freeze order, some "street level"

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JAM members disregard the order and continue to plant explosives. He said that Syrian officials told him they have refused entry to many JAM leaders, but Sadrist official Salah Obaidi is in Syria.

¶5. (C) As a senior member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), Adel said he visited ISCI Chairman Abdel Aziz al-Hakeem in Iran, where he has been undergoing cancer treatment. He said al-Hakeem's health is improving and he will soon visit Iraq for a few weeks. Adel noted that ISCI and the Sadrist are negotiating the text of an agreement in which each group pledges not to engage in attacks on the other and to respect government authorities and institutions. Adel said that ISCI is dealing directly with Moqtada al-Sadr on the language, since agreements with lower-ranking Sadrist have limited scope of effect and validity. (Note: The agreement was announced publicly later on October 6. End Note.) He opined that JAM's August attacks in Karbala led to much destruction but also had a positive effect on the thinking of many Sadrist. He said the security situation in southern Iraq was improving, and that the GOI was inclined to accept a recent court decision allowing Basrah Governor Wa'eli to retain his position. Adel said he would advise the government to live with the court decision because a change of governor at this point would cause more problems than it would solve. The Ambassador gave Adel a brief overview of his recent discussions with British PM Brown, who plans to maintain a reduced British presence at the Basrah Air Station.

Readout of Recent Trip to Arab Countries

¶6. (C) Adel's trip to Iran was the final stop in a ten-day visit to Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan and Syria. He reported that he and the Kuwaitis agreed that a bilateral parliamentary committee would discuss the issue of reparations from Iraq's 1990 invasion, and that Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Abdullah expressed deep concern over rising U.S.-Iran tension. Adel remarked that Syrian President al-Assad seemed

far more positive than before toward the GOI and Iraq's situation: for example, at a joint press conference, Bashar for the first time did not blame Iraq's problems on American occupation, and he pledged support for GOI efforts. Adel said he was shocked to discover that Bashar and his senior aide Faruq al-Shara professed unawareness of the August 26 Declaration by Iraq's top five leaders, and also of the fact that Iraq is still under UNSCR Chapter 7 authority. He said he pressed Bashar to help the GOI contain former Ba'athists who are waging war against the government, adding that the Syrians told him former Ba'athist Izzet al-Durri is not in Syria but in northern Yemen near the Saudi border and that former Ba'athist Yunus al-Ahmed is in Syria. Adel said he is waiting for a "good invitation" to visit Saudi Arabia. The Ambassador noted that Adel's trip had generated a great deal of positive media coverage and that the GOI should adopt an "Arab Strategy" to follow-up on the visit, particularly in light of the upcoming Neighbors Conference in November. Adel acknowledged the absence of and need for such a strategy.

Baghdad Security and Services

¶ 7. (C) After a brief review of key pending legislation (Adel noted he is pushing for a new bill to outlaw political party funding from foreign sources) the Ambassador urged the GOI to build on MNF/GOI success in stabilizing Baghdad's security environment with a corresponding civilian surge to provide improved services to Baghdad residents and to wrest control of such services from militias. Adel boasted of GOI success in stabilizing and bringing improved services to Karrada, a process which included driving JAM from the area (in apparent contradiction to this statement, Adel earlier had said that he had received reports that JAM was launching attacks out of Karrada, scene of the attack on the Polish Ambassador). He said control of access to neighborhoods was key to a successful project. The Ambassador raised the issue of challenges arising from attempts to form local citizen security committees in mixed Sunni-Shia areas such as the Baghdad neighborhood of Saydiah, and suggested that Adel and his ISCI colleagues discuss this issue with the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party. Adel said he would do so, noting that a good first step would be to identify mixed areas in which Sunni-Shia citizen security committees could operate.

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